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Charismatic Renewal and Miraculous Sensitivity at a Catholic Marian Apparition Site in Poland



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In the name of God!

The memorable year 1949

The great occurrence at the pastures in Mazury written down by an eyewitness, Jan Boguń. My niece [Maria] received a promise that [the Mother of God] will come and the time of her apparition will be everyday until on the Day of Pardon she will tell her name and what she demands. ... Policeman wanted to take [Maria,] they said she is sick and lost her mind. And then noise came from above, crowds of people staring at the sky began to scream that the Sun is falling on the Earth and is changing its colors. ... People prayed and cried in wonder; they took her on their shoulders and then the Light appeared above her, rose high and moved toward the church. ... Through the mouth of Maria, the Mother of God called people to pray and to love each other ... and if they will not listen to her, they will be punished. ... She said many things and many people received the gifts of grace. ... Whole pages could be filled with it.¹

It is hard to disagree with the visionary's uncle: the events in Mazury from 1949 onward could indeed inspire a great deal of writing. They offer an illuminating case for studies in the anthropology of religion, as well as for research on the communist and postcommunist history of Poland. I will use the recent discourses and developments that surround the apparition site in Mazury as a lens through which I can zoom in and place in sharp focus important contemporary dynamics within the Roman Catholic Church in Poland—namely, the spread of the charismatic movement within it.² I will examine how this trend reinvigorates and, at the same time, reshapes what Andrzej Hemka and Jacek Olędzki describe as the “miracular sensitivity” (*wrażliwość mirakularna*) of Polish Catholicism.³

1 Fragments from the notebook of Jan Boguń, an uncle of the visionary and, for many years, the guardian of the apparition site. The translation is mine.

2 Andrzej Kobyliński, “Etyczne aspekty współczesnej pentekostalizacji chrześcijaństwa,” *Studia Philosophiae Christianae UKSW* 50, no. 3 (2014): 93–130.

3 Andrzej Hemka and Jacek Olędzki, “Wrażliwość mirakularna,” *Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 44, no. 1 [1990]: 8–14. *Wrażliwość mirakularna* was also translated to English as “miraculous sensitivity” (Bartosz Kaliski, “Nowolipki AD 1959, czyli cud w komunistycznej Warszawie,” *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 1, no. 29 [2017]: 25–49), “miracular susceptibility” (Anna Królikowska, “Beliefs in Manifestations of the Supernatural as an Element of Contemporary Religiosity,” *Opuscula Sociologica* 4,



MARIAN APPARITION IN MAZURY: AN ABUNDANT EVENT

According to Robert Orsi, Marian apparitions such as the one in Mazury are “abundant events” characterized by “an excess of expression and experience.”⁴ They inspire a whole range of actions and reactions and pose questions about

how people meet their gods and how their gods meet them, how humans and their gods make their ways together through the challenges and excitements of life, how the gods became dwellers in the same modern history, independently of their human counterparts, and what they get up to, and what all this means for the social, political, and psychological life of the contemporary world.⁵

Orsi continues by observing that every abundant event “serves as a focusing lens for the intricacies of relationships in a particular area at a particular time, meaning for all the hopes, desires, and fears circulating among a group of people as these were taking shape at a certain place and a certain time.”⁶

Orsi’s last statement inadvertently echoes a much earlier observation by Hemka and Olędzki.⁷ According to them, Marian apparitions reflect peoples’ religiosity as it evolves in relation to historical periods and social environments, and are a specific response to moments of social or political crisis.⁸ As I discuss further in another work, the apparition in Mazury was a part of the largest wave of such events in communist Poland, which swept across the country in 1949–50, so soon after the installment of the communist regime in Poland and during a fierce anti-religious

no. 18 [2016]: 45–61), and “miraculous sensibility” (Maciej Krzywosz, “The Miraculous Sensibility of Two Twentieth-Century Polish Visionaries: Servant of God Rozalia Celakówna and Sr. Wanda Boniszewska,” *Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej* 16, no. 2 [2017]: 177–90).

4 Robert Orsi, “Abundant History: Marian Apparitions as Alternative Modernity,” *Historically Speaking* 9, no. 7 (2008): 12.

5 *Ibid.*, 14.

6 *Ibid.*, 15.

7 Writing about apparitions (and not against them) was considered an “anti-state activity” in communist Poland, so their article, completed in 1976, had to wait until the fall of the regime to be published (Hemka and Olędzki, “Wrażliwość,” 14).

8 *Ibid.*, 9, 12.

campaign launched by this regime.⁹ It was also among the first apparitions to trigger a full-scale propaganda and prevention campaign by the communist authorities.¹⁰ After this campaign, the apparition became a sort of a stigma for locals and was largely forgotten for the next three decades.

However, as Orsi observes, “the abundant event ... is not exhausted at its source. Presence radiates out from the event along a network of routes, a kind of capillary of presence, filling water, relics, images, things, and memories.”¹¹ This “radiating power” is evident in the case of Mazury. During the political thaw and the rise of the Solidarity movement in the early 1980s, a cross was erected at the apparition site. Throughout the 1980s, there were regular pilgrimages from the Podkarpacie region to Mazury. In 1999, after another decade of decay, a series of articles in the local press reignited memories of the apparition site in Mazury.¹² In 2009, the sixtieth anniversary of the apparition was commemorated with a religious service. The tradition of holding services on the anniversary date continues today, and recently a group of believers from villages nearby Mazury have been active in renovating the apparition site and reviving local devotion. It is this last stage of the history of the “abundant event” in Mazury on which I focus in this article.

During my 2015–17 ethnographic fieldwork in Mazury and the neighboring towns and villages of the Podkarpacie region (the southeasternmost part of Poland)¹³, I met with relatives of the visionary, witnesses of the apparition in 1949,

9 Agnieszka Halemba and Konrad Siekierski, “Apparitions of the Mother of God in the Polish People’s Republic in the Early Years of the Cold War,” in *Mary’s Cold Wars: Ideologies, Politics and Devotional Culture*, ed. Peter Jan Margry (New York: Fordham, forthcoming).

10 It is listed as the first one by Piotr Bączek in his archival research of apparitions in Poland in 1946–1953, (“Działania komunistycznego aparatu bezpieczeństwa w odpowiedzi na wydarzenia uznawane za cuda w latach 1946–1953,” *Saeculum Christianum* 21 (2014): 248). According to my ethnographic research, a similar campaign was also launched against a miracle in nearby Lipnica, which started right before the events in Mazury.

11 Orsi, “Abundant,” 15.

12 Benedykt Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 1),” *Ziemia Kolbuszowska* 2, no. 43 (1999): 18–19; Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 2),” *Ziemia Kolbuszowska* 3, no. 44 (1999): 16–17; Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 3),” *Ziemia Kolbuszowska* 4, no. 45 (1999): 18–19; Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 4),” *Ziemia Kolbuszowska* 5, no. 46 (1999): 20–21.

13 Funding for this project came from the National Science Centre in Poland, decision DEC-2013/11/B/HS3/01443



a local author of journal articles about the apparition,¹⁴ guardians of the apparition site, and a few priests. In 2016, I participated in the religious service organized on the sixty-seventh anniversary of the apparition. On several other occasions, I visited Mazury to observe individual pilgrims and engage in conversations with them. In this article, I draw mainly on my conversations with Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław,¹⁵ who have recently assumed the role of the guardians of the apparition site.

From 2014, Jarosław has been participating in Masses with prayers for deliverance and healing, officiated by Catholic charismatic priests. He credits these Masses with his miraculous recovery from partial paralysis, diabetes, and other illnesses. Soon after his initial healing, he was invited to a Rosary prayer at the apparition site in Mazury. Impressed by the site and its history, and as a way to give thanks for his cure, he built the chapel a new roof, installed benches, renewed the sacred well, and put up new fencing. In the meantime, he visited the visionary from Mazury, Maria Boguń,¹⁶ who told him that he would guard the apparition site “until the end of his days.” Jarosław is one the founders of *The Touch of Mary (Dotyk Maryi)*, a charity that helps victims of domestic violence, prostitutes who wish leave their profession, and other people in need.

My meetings with Jarosław were followed by a similarly extensive conversation with Barbara and Danuta. They cooperated for some time with Jarosław, but recently their ways have parted. Friends of Anna, a recently deceased woman who earlier was cured from cancer when praying in Mazury, Barbara and Danuta run a foundation called *The Flower of the Meadows (Kwiat Łąk)*. The goal of the foundation is to build a hospice at the apparition site for people like Anna, who suffer from cancer. As Barbara and Danuta told me:

14 Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 1)”;

Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 2)”;

Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 3)”;

Popek, “Mała Fatima Rzeszowszczyzny (cz. 4)”;

Popek, “Rocznica mazurskich objawień,” *Więści Raniżowskie* 148 (2009): 14–15.

15 All names of my interlocutors have been altered.

16 Nowadays, the visionary lives in a city some fifty kilometers from Mazury. She does not take part in any initiatives related to the apparition site, does not visit the place or talk about what happened to her in 1949, and only scarcely accepts any guests.



We heard about the apparition site in Mazury from our parents, one of them saw here the Miracle of the Sun. You can really feel that this is not an ordinary place. But we came here for the first time only four years ago. ... We thought that we could bring Anna here and pray a novena for her,¹⁷ because she was in really bad shape. We started on Monday and on Tuesday she went to the doctor who said that the cancer had disappeared. This is how everything has begun. ... Earlier we were typical Sunday Catholics¹⁸ who go to church but have no real relation with God. But this has changed thanks to Mazury. We got involved in the charismatic movement. We are growing in the spiritual sense.

These conversations with Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław allowed me to grasp at a grassroots level the changing character of Polish Catholic miraculous sensitivity as influenced by the recent proliferation of the charismatic movement. In the remaining part of this article, I will discuss this question in more detail.

MIRACULAR SENSITIVITY AND THE CHARISMATIC MOVEMENT IN POLISH CATHOLICISM

According to Hemka and Olędzki, miraculous sensitivity is the “anticipation of the extraordinary ... which stresses the importance of the authentic state of grace,” and which is characterized by “the need for divine apparitions and divine interventions in worldly matters but also the need for extraordinary events which are, nevertheless, in accord with a traditional and enduring system of values.”¹⁹ In their analysis of several Marian apparitions in communist Poland, the authors see miraculous sensitivity as one of the central features of Polish-Catholic “folk religiosity” (*religijność ludowa*).

Folk religiosity, as described by Stefan Czarnowski,²⁰ was for a long time an

17 The novena is a traditional form of devotion in Christianity, including in the Catholic Church. It consists of individual or group prayers repeated over the course of nine consecutive days or weeks. As in the case of Anna, a novena is often prayed as a form of petition for divine grace.

18 “Sunday Catholic” is a direct translation of *niedzielnny katolik*, a term widely used in Poland, and a rough equivalent of the English language phrase “Cafeteria Catholic.”

19 Hemka and Olędzki, “Wrażliwość,” 9, 12.

20 Stefan Czarnowski, *Dzieła*, Vol. 1. *Studia z historii kultury* (Warszawa: Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy), 88-107.



important concept in ethnographical studies on “religion as practised”²¹ in traditional rural milieu in Poland. Such religiosity was characterized not only by miraculous sensitivity but also collectivism, ritualism, sensualism, and traditionalism. However, time-honored village life “irrevocably fell apart as a result of urbanisation, communication technologies, and the progressive ‘disenchantment of the world’”²² in the late twentieth century. At the same time, there have been signs of the secularization of Catholicism in Poland, such as the decreasing popularity of certain devotional practices,²³ growing rationalization and intellectualization of religious beliefs, and Catholics’ increasingly widespread approach to their faith, according to which “God still exists, but has ‘lost’ the power to influence their life choices.”²⁴

As a result of these sociocultural changes, but also because of a growing reflection on the inherent biases of the concept itself, folk religiosity has become an object of critique for Polish anthropologists of religion. They “treat it with suspiciousness,”²⁵

- 21 Ellen Badone, introduction to *Religious Orthodoxy and Popular Faith in European Society*, ed. Badone (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 6.
- 22 Magdalena Zowczak, “Między tradycją a komercją,” *Znak* 3, no. 634 (2008), <http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6342008magdalena-zowczakmiędzy-tradycją-a-komercją/>
- 23 In 1980, 51 percent of all Catholics were *dominantes* (participants of Sunday liturgy). In 2015, that number dropped to 39.8 percent (*Annuario Statisticum Ecclesiae in Polonia, AD 2017* [Warszawa: Instytut Statystyki Kościoła Katolickiego, 2017]: 18, <http://www.iskk.pl/images/stories/Instytut/dokumenty/AnnuarioStatisticum2016.pdf>). Other forms of devotion that have lost some of their appeal include vespers, novenas, and ascetic practices (Izabella Bukraba-Rylska, “Religijność ludowa i jej niemuzykalni krytycy,” *Znak* 3, no. 634 (2008), <http://www.miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/6342008izabellabukraba-rylskareligijnosc-ludowa-i-jej-niemuzykalni-krytycy/>).
- 24 Leon Dyczewski, introduction to *Secularization and the Development of Religion in Modern Polish Society*, ed. Dyczewski (Washington, DC: Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 2015), 1. For instance, according to the research conducted in 2009, only 18 percent of respondents agreed that God’s commands ultimately define what is good and what is evil (Rafał Boguszewski, *Moralność Polaków po dwudziestu latach przemian* [Warszawa: CBOS, 2009], 4, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_040_09.PDF), just 29 percent pointed to a “deep religious faith” as the source of ultimate meaning in life (Boguszewski, *Wiara i religijność Polaków dwadzieścia lat po rozpoczęciu przemian ustrojowych* [Warszawa: CBOS, 2009], 2, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_034_09.PDF), and between 22 and 31 percent declared their disbelief in such fundamental aspects of Catholic doctrine as original sin and the existence of heaven and hell (Boguszewski, *Wiara*, 13–14).
- 25 Magdalena Lubańska, “Problemy etnograficznych badań nad religijnością,” in *Religijność chrześcijan obrządku wschodniego na pograniczu polsko-ukraińskim*, ed. Lubańska (Warszawa: DiG, 2007): 8–11.





A main chapel
in Mazury at the
anniversary day of
apparitions (2015).
Photo credit:
Konrad Siekierski

see it as “well-worn,”²⁶ and replace it with other concepts, such as “lived religiosity” (*religijność przeżywana*)²⁷ and “religiosity of folk type” (*religijność typu ludowego*).²⁸ While this farewell to folk religiosity is certainly well supported, I also agree with Anna Królikowska²⁹ and Magdalena Zowczak³⁰ that some features associated with it are not obsolete. Rather, they have “become an important element that enhances certain forms of contemporary religion.”³¹ One such feature is, precisely, miraculous sensitivity, which despite being a hallmark of a now bygone folk religiosity, still shows a great resilience today.

Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska noted in the summary of her recent research in northeastern Poland that “although we came too late to witness [traditional religious practices], we still met people gifted ... with miraculous sensitivity.”³²

26 Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, “Współczesna religijność na Kurpiach,” *Etnografia Polska* 53, no. 1-2 (2009): 149.

27 Anna Niedźwiedz, “Od religijności ludowej do religijności przeżywanej,” in *Kultura ludowa. Teorie – praktyki – polityki*, eds. Barbara Fatyga and Ryszard Michalski (Warszawa: Instytut Stosowanych Nauk Społecznych, 2014): 327-338.

28 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Obraz osobliwy: hermeneutyczna lektura źródeł etnograficznych* (Kraków: Universitas, 2000).

29 Anna Królikowska, “Elementy ‘ludowe’ w religijności współczesnej?” *Opuscula Sociologica* 4, no. 10 (2014): 5-16.

30 Zowczak, “Między tradycją.”

31 Królikowska, “Elementy,” 6.

32 Baraniecka-Olszewska, “Współczesna,” 149.

In Mazury, I also met many such people: witnesses of the apparition in 1949, residents of nearby villages, and people from afar, who all come to this site in search of divine intervention. They kneel down in front of the chapel, say their prayers, and take water from the sacred well. Some stay longer to pray on the Rosary, others write down their requests or acknowledgements in the pilgrims' book. As Jan, who since 2009 has organized the annual religious services at the apparition site, told me: "Priests say: 'Faith, only faith.' For me such faith without signs and miracles is empty. And here in Mazury we have these signs."

The main figure to whom Polish Catholics have looked with an "anticipation of extraordinary"³³ has been the Mother of God. She is "a Polish 'master symbol' [whose] veneration is deeply rooted in Polish history, culture, and society."³⁴ Such practices as the Rosary prayer, the May devotion, and the Fatima devotion are among the most popular forms of Catholic piety in Poland.³⁵ The Mother of God abundantly responds to the anticipation of the faithful: in recent decades, she has appeared in Poland hundreds of times, unlike any other figure venerated by the Catholic Church.

Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław have no doubts about the special sacred power bestowed to the apparition site in Mazury because it "has been chosen by the Mother of God." Despite the remote location, they all see it as the place where—precisely because of the apparition—a charitable and religious center should be established. Barbara and Danuta admitted that they feel called by the Mother of God to visit the apparition site where, according to them, the saint is still present: "Our friend was here a few months ago and she could smell the scent of roses next to the Cross. And at that moment someone said: 'The Mother of God is here!' She looked at the sky and saw her for a fraction of second." In turn, Jarosław told me that the events in 1949 were just a prelude to an even more important future apparition in Mazury, when the Mother of God will give a new message, perhaps comparable in

33 Hemka and Olędzki, "Wrażliwość," 12.

34 Cathelijne de Busser and Anna Niedźwiedz, "Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol," in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World*, eds. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 87.

35 Wojciech Sadłoń, *Kult Matki Bożej i nabożeństwo fatimskie w parafiach katolickich w Polsce* (Warsawa: ISKK, 2016), http://iskk.pl/images/stories/Instytut/dokumenty/Kult_MB_raport2016.pdf



its importance to her words in Fatima and Lourdes.

Such traditional Catholic miraculous sensitivity requires the extraordinary moments and places when and where “the transcendent [breaks] into time.”³⁶ This attitude toward the sacred has its source in the teachings of the Catholic Church, according to which “we experience God only indirectly, because a direct contact with God is a unique gift.”³⁷ Although this stance was amended by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), for the majority of Polish Catholics, “it was St. Theresa who communicated with God while frying pancakes. For a mere mortal this kind of religious experience ... is not available.”³⁸

However, in the stories of Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław, one can also see a kind of miraculous sensitivity, which is new in the Polish Catholic context. It closely resembles what Joseph Webster calls an “expectancy.”³⁹ As he shows in the example of Scottish Protestants, such expectancy is about the constant penetration of the immanent by the transcendent, rather than about rare and spectacular moments that reveal “the presence of the human and the divine to each other.”⁴⁰ In Webster’s words,

Locally, “there is no such thing as coincidence,” these Christians expected to experience both the transcendent ordering of life by divine providence through God’s immanence and the transcendent disordering of life by demonic attack through the Devil’s immanence ... this ordering and disordering frequently occurred through everyday objects [and] seemingly mundane events.⁴¹

The story Barbara and Danuta told me about Mazury was all about various “God-incidences”⁴² and divine ordering. For example, one of the women visited the site

36 Orsi, “Abundant,” 12.

37 Kobyliński, “Etyczne,” 104.

38 Irena Borowik, *Procesy instytucjonalizacji i prywatyzacji religii w powojennej Polsce* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 1997), 141.

39 Joseph Webster, “The Immanence of Transcendence: God and the Devil on the Aberdeenshire Coast,” *Ethnos* 78, no. 3 (2013): 381–85.

40 Orsi, “Abundant,” 14.

41 Webster, “The Immanence,” 380.

42 Ibid., 385.

for the first time on the anniversary day of the apparition; Anna, their friend and first leader, died when another of them was on the pilgrimage to Fatima; and on many occasions they heard and read words they interpreted as prophetic. As Barbara and Danuta concluded, “Everything that has been happening is so much interconnected, it is like a thread which has led us.”

For Jarosław, “the fact that we were able to renovate the chapel, find people who sponsored it, and have the liturgy here, were real miracles. If God did not want it, it wouldn’t happen.” He also shared with me several stories of divine intervention and demonic influence. For instance, once when he was driving back from the apparition site, he could neither speed up nor slow down his car. He interpreted this event as a clear sign from God that he should be patient in whatever he does and have trust that God controls the course of events. On another occasion, Jarosław was the victim of an accident, which he saw as an obvious case of demonic attack:

You see this scar on my forehead? This metal pole from the fence around the chapel lifted by itself and hit me. Satan did it to punish me for renewing this chapel, but I praise the Lord. God allowed it to happen to show to the doubtful that this is, indeed, the sacred place.

This new form of miraculous sensitivity has its source in the proliferation of Charismatic Christianity within Polish Catholicism. This trend is by no means unique to Poland. Rather, it can be observed in various shapes and on various scales wherever Catholics live.⁴³ As Thomas Csordas describes it, “The Catholic Charismatic

43 In many countries, the growth of the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church is more advanced and has received more scholarly attention than in Poland (cf. Edward Cleary, *The Rise of Charismatic Catholicism in Latin America* [Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011]; Thomas Csordas, “Global Religion and the Reenchantment of the World,” in *Transnational Transcendence: Essays on Religion and Globalization*, ed. Csordas [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009], 73–95; Jakob Egerth Thorsen, *Charismatic Practice and Catholic Parish Life* [Leiden: Brill, 2015]). To an even larger extent, charismatic devotion makes its way to traditional Protestant congregations, in addition to a rapid growth of Pentecostal churches (cf. Andrew Chesnut, *Born Again in Brazil: Pentecostal Boom and the Pathogens of Poverty* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997]; Simon Coleman, *The Globalisation of Charismatic Christianity* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000]; Simon Coleman and Rosalind Hackett, eds. *The Anthropology of Global Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism* [New York and London: New York University Press, 2015]; Timothy Steigenga and Edward Cleary, eds. *Conversion of a Continent: Contemporary Religious Change in Latin America* [New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008]).



Renewal is a movement within the Catholic Church which incorporates Pentecostal practices into Catholicism.”⁴⁴ As he further explains, the movement was born in 1967 in the United States just after the Second Vatican Council in 1962–65, which opened for the Catholic Church “the way for the adoption of the Pentecostal phenomena in their already developed ritual forms,” including charismatic faith-healing, new forms of praying meetings, biblicism, and focus on “spiritual gifts.”⁴⁵ In Poland, the charismatic movement was introduced in the mid-1970s,⁴⁶ but until recently, it remained mainly confined to the prayer groups of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit.⁴⁷ However, in the last decade charismatic devotion has increasingly blended with other forms of Catholic religiosity in Poland.

The proliferation of the charismatic movement is cherished as a blessing by some members of the Catholic Church, whereas others see it as an enemy at the gate and an enemy in the ranks. A good example of this mixed reception is a recent argument between two priests and scholars from the Catholic University in Warsaw. After one of them described the charismatic movement as “not only an external challenge but also a serious internal threat, because the Pentecostal movement begins to profoundly change contemporary Catholicism from within,”⁴⁸ his opponent rejected this critique and claimed that someone “who does not see the difference between the Pentecostal movement and Catholic Charismatic Renewal either does it in bad faith or does not understand the Renewal in the Holy Spirit [which is] a great chance for a revival of faith in the Catholic Church in Poland.”⁴⁹

44 Csordas, *The Sacred Self: A Cultural Phenomenology of Charismatic Healing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994), 16.

45 Ibid. The umbrella organization for the movement became the International Catholic Charismatic Renewal Services, approved by the Vatican in 1993.

46 This was done by several Polish priests who had previously visited the United States and received “the baptism in the Holy Spirit.”

47 At the first nationwide congress of charismatic Catholics in 1983 in Częstochowa they adopted an official name of the Charismatic Movement of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit (*Charyzmatyczny Ruch Odnowy w Duchu Świętym*); in popular parlance, this title is usually shortened to the Renewal in the Holy Spirit (*Odnova w Duchu Świętym*). In the first decade of the present century, the Renewal had around thirty thousand members, who gathered in some 750–800 groups in all dioceses in Poland (Konrad Siekierski, “Catholics in the Holy Spirit: The Charismatic Renewal in Poland,” *Religion, State and Society* 40, no. 1 [2012]: 146–47).

48 Kobyliński, “Etyczne,” 115.

49 Leszek Misiarczyk, “Czy Kościołowi katolickiemu w Polsce rzeczywiście grozi pentekostalizacja?”



This dispute aside, the impact of the charismatic movement is increasingly visible in many dimensions of religious life in Poland. Belief in an immediate presence of Satan in people's everyday lives is resurgent after a previous retreat from Catholic imagery. Also on the rise are the requests for exorcisms, prayers for deliverance, blessings of sacramentals, and other related practices. Whereas in the late twentieth century exorcists in Poland could be counted on one hand, twenty years later their number exceeds a hundred, which is still insufficient to satisfy the demand on their services. Exorcised or blessed water, oil, and salt are making their way to Catholics' houses while devotional scapulars and other protective amulets are increasingly often worn around their necks.⁵⁰ More and more people randomly (or under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, as they see it) open the Bible in order to search for words of guidance. The militant character of Charismatic Christianity—specifically, the way it depicts the world as an arena of the struggle between good and evil—reinforces the popular view that Polish Catholicism is the stronghold of faith in a decayed Europe.⁵¹ New forms of devotion based on the principle of direct contact with the divine emerge and gain mass popularity. Examples include the Extreme Way of the Cross (*Ekstremalna Droga Krzyżowa*),⁵² the Evenings of Glory (*Wieczory Chwały*), and the Masses with the prayers for healing (*msze z modlitwą*

Frona.pl, <http://www.frona.pl/a/ks-prof-leszek-misiarczyk-dla-frondapl-czy-kościolowi-katolickiemu-w-polsce-rzeczywiście-grozi-pentekostalizacja,55502.html>

- 50 A scapular is a Catholic religious garment worn over the shoulders as a sign of piety. There exist two main kinds of scapulars: monastic and devotional; the latter available to lay believers. They usually take the form of two small plaques connected with a rope; one placed on the breast, another on the back of a wearer. Currently, there are eighteen different devotional scapulars approved by the Roman Catholic Church. Although devotional scapulars have been a part of Catholic piety since the Middle Ages, I suggest that their recent popularity is related to the spread of Charismatic Christianity.
- 51 This view is reflected in the statistics, according to which 62 percent of respondents see the situation of the Catholic Church in Poland as "rather good" or "decisively good," whereas only 38 percent have a similar opinion about the situation of the Church in Europe (Boguszewski, *Ocena obecnej sytuacji kościoła katolickiego oraz oczekiwania wobec nowego papieża* [Warszawa: CBOS, 2013], 2, http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2013/K_037_13.PDF)
- 52 The Extreme Way of the Cross, organized across Poland on the eve of the Holy Week, is a night-long walk along routes of 30–100 kilometers, accompanied by meditations on the Passion of Christ (Siekierski, "Пора покончить с этой религией комфорта! Текст и тело в Экстремальном крестном пути," *Государство, религия, церковь в России и за рубежом* 3, no. 34 [2016]: 132–47; Siekierski, "Faith and Fatigue in the Extreme Way of the Cross in Poland," *Religion, State and Society* 46, no. 2 [2018]: 108–122.





o uzdrowienie). The latter gave birth to a new form of pilgrimage—this time not to the places deemed sacred but to the priests renowned for their special “spiritual gift.”

All these phenomena are well reflected in the stories of Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław. Regular participants in charismatic Masses, they have sometimes traveled as far as Częstochowa, 250 kilometers from Mazury, to attend them. During such Masses, Jarosław has experienced faith-healing. He has also attended the Evenings of Glory and walked the Extreme Way of the Cross. Danuta has been an active member of the Renewal in the Holy Spirit. Barbara has often consulted the Bible for guidance by opening it and reading the first verse that caught her eye. Jarosław has frequently offered exorcised salt and water to people who, in his opinion, needed it. Furthermore, he said, “because of Mazury I helped more than three hundred people in just two months to put on scapulars.” He also has had his own interpretation of the message given by the Mother of God during her apparition in Mazury, which was clearly rooted in the idea of “spiritual warfare” that is widespread among charismatic Christians:

She said that there will be a Third World War. People think that this means another conflict, similar to the First and Second World War. But this war has

A sacred well
and cross at the
apparition site in
Mazury. View from
the main chapel.
Photo credit:
Konrad Siekierski

already started. This is the worst war: the war for faith. How many people treat their religion seriously? There are a billion Catholics in the world. But how many of them follow the Holy Spirit? Perhaps a million or two.

The activities and initiatives taken by Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław have made the apparition site in Mazury a place where popular Catholicism in its most widespread form of Marian piety entwines with charismatic elements. A good illustration of this phenomenon is a story Danuta told me:

We always go there because of the call of the heart, as if the Mother of God is calling us, and we always return with some spiritual gifts. ... I belong to the Renewal in the Holy Spirit and at one meeting I told the other members about the anniversary of the apparition in Mazury. And one colleague from the group said: "I will go with you." We prayed and he took water from the sacred well. When we were about to leave, I heard an inner voice telling me to get out of the car. I followed this voice and then I smelled a beautiful scent of wild roses. I told my colleague about it and he said: "The Mother of God gave thanks to you for bringing me here."

Another example is an instance of cooperation between Jarosław and two charismatic priests. After visiting Mazury, one of them reassured him that the place indeed emanates with the divine power. Another priest officiated in the summer of 2015 at a charismatic Mass on the occasion of the sixty-sixth anniversary of the apparition. According to Jarosław, this event attracted some three thousand people, many of whom experienced charismatic devotion for the first time. As one of the participants described it to me: "The Mass could convince even the people of weak faith. And when the priest prayed upon the people, some fifteen of them collapsed. I never saw anything like it." Encouraged by this apparent success, Jarosław planned to organize similar religious events on a regular basis: "We ask God to have once a month such a liturgy and prayer as they have in Częstochowa, where Fr. Galus gathers ten to fifteen thousand people. Each time, two or three thousand people go there from our region. But they could come here, this is such a beautiful and sacred place."



The situation that occurs when Catholic Marian piety meets and merges with charismatic practices is not unique to Mazury. Quite the opposite: the case I discuss here is indicative of a more general trend in which Charismatic Christianity incorporates local religious traditions and adjusts its own devotional repertoire in accordance with them.⁵³ A telling example was the first general conference of Charismatic Catholics in Poland, which took place in 1983 at the Jasna Góra monastery in Częstochowa, regarded as the spiritual center of the nation. Before the gathering, the participants prayed to the Mother of God for her intercession, and the conference was concluded by an all-night adoration of the icon of the Our Lady of Częstochowa.⁵⁴

Just as in Poland, Charismatic Catholics in other countries also show keen interest in Marian devotion and Marian apparitions. For instance, Thomas Csordas describes two recent apparitions in Brasil, during which “charismatics were involved from the outset, some moving to live in the locality of the apparitions.” He also shows how, in one case, they took a leading role in the development of new devotion, whereas in the second case, their activities at the apparition site were restricted by Catholic monks who run a local parish.⁵⁵

The situation in Mazury is closer to the latter case. Here we see a tension between the believers influenced by the charismatic movement who support the cause of the apparition and the local hierarchy of the Church who oppose it. The reason for such a situation seems to be twofold. First, the Catholic Church in general takes a cautious, if not reluctant, stance on apparitions. Out of hundreds of manifestations of the Mother of God in communist and postcommunist Poland, only one—the so called “miracle in Lublin” (*cud lubelski*) in 1949—has been approved by the Church.⁵⁶ Similarly, recent attempts by Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław to have the apparition in Mazury investigated and acknowledged have fallen on deaf ears. They

53 One of the most striking examples of such “inculturation” is the revival and transformation of witchcraft under the influence of Charismatic Christianity, observed nowadays in different parts of the world (cf. Knut Rio, Michelle MacCarthy, and Ruy Blanes, eds. *Pentecostalism and Witchcraft: Spiritual Warfare in Africa and Melanesia* [London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017]).

54 Siekierski, “Catholics,” 146–47.

55 Csordas, “Global,” 81.

56 Halemba and Siekierski, “Technologies.”

have collected several testimonials about miraculous healings at the apparition site and handed them, together with a description of the events in 1949, to the local bishop in Rzeszów, but have received no response.

Second, there is the issue of power relations within the Church. “The fact that nowadays laymen have an increasing influence on religious events”⁵⁷ in Poland is at least partially related to the spread of the charismatic movement, with its focus on personal relation with God. Due to the initiative of believers such as Barbara, Danuta, and Jarosław, the apparition site in Mazury has been revitalized, it is visited by an increasing number of pilgrims, and it now hosts religious services. My interlocutors envisage it as a future location of a charitable center and as an important and officially acknowledged Marian shrine. However, the priest in Mazury saw recent developments at the apparition site as an unnecessary excess of devotion that takes people away from their parishes. When Jarosław wanted to organize regular charismatic Masses in Mazury, his initiative was blocked by the diocese, and since then no more public liturgies have been officiated at the apparition site. Despite this disapproval, the guardians of the site feel empowered to search for alternative paths within the Church in order to realize their goals. This capacity to act in the religious sphere is reinforced by their experience with the charismatic movement, which allows them to place whatever happens in the sacred context. By way of explanation, Barbara and Danuta concluded our conversation: “Some people, including priests, do not understand us. But we just have a close relation with God.” Taking it a step further, Jarosław interpreted the controversy around the apparition not only as a matter of contention between the faithful and the institution but also between divine and diabolic powers: “This is spiritual war. Instead of supporting us, they put up roadblocks; instead of investigating the apparition, they do nothing. The Devil attacks us because we are trying to do something in Mazury.”

57 Kamila Baraniecka-Olszewska, “The Role of the Religious Crowd in the Mass Catholic Events: The Passion Play and Nativity Play in Warsaw,” *Anthropological Notebooks* 20, no. 2 (2014): 40.



CONCLUSION

Drawing on the example of the apparition site in Mazury, I have offered a reflection on the changing “dispositions characteristic of the religious milieu”⁵⁸ of contemporary Polish Catholicism. The current proliferation of the charismatic movement within the Catholic Church in Poland not only attests to Robert Orsi’s observation that “there are people ... in the modern world who live in ways beyond the conceptual range of modernist epistemology and historiography,”⁵⁹ but also fast increases the ranks of such people. I have looked at how the spread of the charismatic movement reinvigorates and, at the same time, reshapes the miraculous sensitivity of popular Catholicism in Poland. One of the results of this process is that the Catholic yearning for extraordinary moments when “the transcendent [breaks] into time,”⁶⁰ as manifested by Marian apparitions, is replenished with a Protestant-style “expectancy”⁶¹ of the presence of the supernatural in daily lives, ordinary events, and mundane objects. This development makes an important, if still little touched in Poland, subject of inquiry for anthropological research. By paying close attention to it, we can learn more about how, in today’s world, “people meet their gods and how their gods meet them.”⁶²

58 Csordas, “Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology,” *Ethos* 18, no. 1 (1990): 20.

59 Orsi, “Abundant,” 15.

60 Ibid., 12.

61 Webster, “The Immanence,” 381–85.

62 Orsi, “Abundant,” 14.

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